
New Developments in the United States Approach to Landmines

By
Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr.,
Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs

[The following are excerpts of the *On-The-Record Briefing*, Washington, D.C., February 27, 2004.]

I wish to announce the President's policy decisions and initiatives relating to landmines. There are several elements, but the thrust of the policy is that the United States will now accelerate, by its example, diplomacy and resources, the effort to end the humanitarian crisis caused by live landmines left behind in former conflict areas all over the world. More specifically, under the new policy, the United States is committed to eliminate persistent landmines of all types from its arsenal by a date certain and is requesting a substantial increase in funding for our humanitarian mine action programs worldwide.

The President's policy serves two important goals: a strong push to end the humanitarian risks posed by landmines; and ensuring that our military has the defensive capabilities it needs to protect our own and friendly forces on the battlefield. The new policy demonstrates that our humanitarian and military goals are fully compatible; one does not have to be achieved only at the expense of the other. We can and will prevent unnecessary harm to innocent civilians and, at the same time, protect the lives of American service men and women.

The President's approach departs from landmine policy formulations of the past. It addresses squarely the condition that has caused the humanitarian crisis of civilian casualties and continued hazards in cities, towns and farmlands around the world. That condition is called persistence, referring to a live landmine that sits, ready to explode, for months, years, and often decades, after the conflict that led to its use has ended. We estimate that there are sixty million persistent landmines posing risks to innocent civilians in more than sixty countries today.

The President's policy applies to all persistent landmines, be they anti-personnel landmines or the larger anti-vehicle landmines. Let me spell out the four key elements of the President's new policy:

- The first element is the President's firm, specific and unconditional commitment that after 2010 the United States will not use persistent landmines of any type, neither anti-personnel nor anti-vehicle landmines. The United States becomes the first major military power to make this comprehensive commitment regarding all persistent landmines. Any use of persistent anti-vehicle landmines outside Korea between now and the end of 2010 will require Presidential authorization. The use of persistent anti-personnel landmines during this period would only be authorized in fulfillment of our treaty obligations to the Republic of Korea. In either case, use of these mines would be in strict accordance with our obligations under international agreements on the use of these weapons. Within two years, the United States will begin the destruction of those persistent landmines that are not needed for the defense of Korea.

- The second element of the new policy is a firm commitment that within one year the United States will no longer have any non-detectable landmine of any type in its arsenal. The United States becomes the first major military power to make a commitment covering all landmines to the internationally recognized level of eight grams iron ore equivalent of metal content, assuring reliable detection by humanitarian deminers using the standard equipment in use today.

- Third, the President has directed a concerted effort to develop alternatives to its current persistent landmines, both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle, incorporating enhanced self-destructing, self-deactivating technologies and control mechanisms, such as “man-in-the-loop” and on-off commands that would allow our forces to recover the munitions. These enhancements are to be brought forward within the decade.

- The fourth major element of this policy is the President’s decision to request from Congress a 50 percent increase in the budget for worldwide humanitarian mine action programs administered by the Department of State, starting in fiscal year 2005, measured against the fiscal year 2003 budget level, to a total level of \$70 million. Additionally, the Administration will soon solicit international support for a worldwide ban on the sale or export of all persistent mines, with exceptions only for training deminers or countermine personnel, improving countermine capabilities, and the like. The United States already has a statutory prohibition on transfers of anti-personnel landmines, and we will continue to obey the law.

The Administration came to this position in drawing from sixteen years of United States experience assisting mine-affected communities all over the world. The United States is already the world’s largest contributor to humanitarian mine action, having provided close to \$800 million to forty-six countries over the past decade for landmine clearance, mine risk education and survivor assistance. What we have seen, very simply, is that the landmines harming innocent men, women and children, and their livestock, are persistent landmines. Nor are these lingering hazards caused solely by the anti-personnel category of persistent landmines. We find that persistent anti-vehicle landmines are left behind following conflicts, posing deadly risks to innocent people and requiring remediation by ourselves and the many other parties engaged in humanitarian mine action.

And so the President’s policy focuses on the kinds of landmines that have caused the humanitarian crisis, namely persistent landmines, and it extends to all persistent landmines because the roads and fields we are helping to clear, in the Balkans, Africa, Asia and elsewhere, are infested with lethal anti-vehicle landmines in addition to the live anti-personnel landmines. Let me hasten to add that the President’s decision to end United States military use of persistent landmines after 2010 is not to draw a connection between our military and the harm being done to civilians in mine-affected countries. The deadly landmines being painstakingly uncovered by the deminers of many nationalities, hard at work in at least forty mine-affected countries today, are not mines left behind by United States forces, the only potential exception being United States mines left behind during the Vietnam conflict more than three decades ago. Rather, the worldwide humanitarian crisis is very much the product of persistent landmines used by other militaries or non-state actors who did not observe international conventions relating to the use of these munitions. The United States military already follows the strictures of the *Amended Mines Protocol* and the *Convention on Conventional Weapons*, which specifies obligations to mark, monitor and clear persistent minefields after hostilities end.

So the question may be, “Why impose restraints on the United States use of persistent landmines if these American munitions are not the ones contributing to the humanitarian crisis?” The answer is that the Administration recognized that persistent landmines used indiscriminately by so many others have created a serious crisis with at least 300,000 innocent victims, by most estimates, and a terrible burden on the international community to help mine-affected countries clear these mines and help their societies recover from conflict, particularly their landmine survivors.

Under the President’s policy, the United States will take even further measures to ensure these weapons do not threaten civilians by becoming the first major military power to adopt a policy ending use of all persistent landmines, and maintaining the international standard of detectability

for landmines of any kind. We are not seeking to impose our policy on other countries, but this policy correctly places the focus on the problems that can be caused by persistent landmines. We want to strengthen provisions in existing international arms control mechanisms relating to the use of persistent landmines of any kind, and compliance with the goal of ending the indiscriminate laying of persistent landmines anywhere in the world.

Now, as you may have inferred from the emphasis on persistence as the source of the humanitarian problem with landmines, there are other kinds of landmines on which the Administration's policy is not imposing restrictions. These munitions have reliable features that limit the life of the munition to a matter of hours or a few days, by which time it self-destructs. And in the unlikely event the self-destruct features fail, the battery will run out within ninety days, rendering it inert, and these batteries always expire. The evidence is clear that self-destruct and self-deactivate landmine munitions do not contribute to the grave risks of civilian injury that we find with persistent landmines that can and do, literally, wait for decades before claiming an innocent victim.

To illustrate this point, if all landmines ever used had been destroyed within hours or days of being deployed, and in any case rendered inert after ninety days, there would be no humanitarian landmine issue in the world today. We would not see an estimated 10,000 civilian casualties every year. Refugees would not resist returning to their villages and farms for fear of mine explosions, and we would not need to mount a global humanitarian mine action effort.

At this point, let me invite my Defense Department colleague, Dr. Joseph Collins to address the military requirements aspect of the President's policy.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the joint staff of our military services were active partners in the development of the policy that Secretary Bloomfield has outlined for you today. Let me say just a few words about the military aspects of landmines. The United States military forces presently carry a very large burden of security missions around the world. Recent history has shown that we cannot predict with confidence where, or against whom, our forces may be engaged in hostilities.

It is the considered judgment of our senior military commanders that they need the defensive capabilities that landmines can provide. These capabilities enable a commander to shape the battlefield to his or her advantage. They deny the enemy freedom to maneuver his forces. They enhance the effectiveness of other weapons systems, such as small arms, artillery or combat aircraft. They act as force multipliers, allowing us to fight and win with fire with fewer forces, rather, against numerically superior opponents; and they also protect our forces, saving the lives of our men and women in uniform. At present, no other weapon system exists that provides all of these capabilities.

As Assistant Secretary Bloomfield mentioned, the President's policy calls for the development of more sophisticated, counter-mobility and tactical barrier capabilities in the future. But the United States Armed Forces will retain the ability to use self-destruct, self-deactivate landmines.

In sum, the President's policy strikes an appropriate balance that accommodates two important national interests: It takes significant and comprehensive steps, by our example and by the increased commitment of funds backed by a strategic plan, toward surmounting the global problem caused by persistent landmines, while at the same time meeting the needs of our military for defensive capabilities that may save American and friendly forces' lives in combat. Many Americans, and others, upon hearing of the new United States policy, will ask how the United States policy relates to the *Ottawa Treaty* banning anti-personnel landmines of all kinds. And

while we have no desire to revisit or revive policy disagreements of the previous decade, we will not become a party to the *Ottawa Treaty*.

The *Ottawa Convention* offers no protection for innocent civilians in post-conflict areas from the harm caused by persistent anti-vehicle landmines, and it would take away a needed means of protection from our men and women in uniform who may be operating in harm's way. We are hopeful that Americans will support the President's judgment that focusing on persistent mines, both anti-vehicle and anti-personnel landmines, addresses the root of the humanitarian crisis, which is indiscriminately used persistent landmines of all types.

With that in mind, we will work with other nations within the treaty provisions of the *Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons* to seek the end — to end the discriminate use — indiscriminate use of all landmines.

As a final note, it should be clear that the President's decision to increase substantially our humanitarian mine action funding is a positive call to action in cooperation with all our partners in humanitarian mine action. This \$70 million Mine Action Program will be conducted on the basis of a comprehensive strategic plan with clear measures of performance. The intent is to provide relief to mine-affected areas of greatest humanitarian need and to accelerate their progress toward being declared mine safe. We recognize that among the nations dedicated to mine action, there may be differing perspectives on landmine policy, based on respective national equities involved. But it is a high priority for this Administration to have effective coordination and partnership among donor nations, the United Nations and the international non-government organization community. We should never let policy debates stand in the way of the strongest, most comprehensive and energetic possible global effort to help mine-affected countries and their people overcome the burdens of persistent landmines still waiting to claim new victims under their feet.

There are many Americans, and a large international community of people and organizations, who have dedicated tremendous effort to address this humanitarian crisis in recent years, and we respect and appreciate them all. In conclusion, as we carry out these policy and program initiatives directed by the President, we look forward to working with the Congress, our private partners in humanitarian mine action, and the international community to accelerate progress in ending this terrible problem around the world once and for all.